

Microenterprise Leads to Independent Lives

For Alpha Diene, a 31-year-old silkscreen entrepreneur, printing T-shirts is more than a job. It's the road to independence. Like 70 percent of disabled people in Senegal, Diene lives with the aftermath of polio, a sometimes deadly but preventable disease.

Yet even in a country where health resources are scarce and services for the disabled are few and far between, Diene maintains that disability is partly a state of mind. "No one should be sentenced to live at home," he says. "Disabled people have a lot to contribute."

Alpha Diene was inspired to start his own T-shirt business, "The Active Life," after attending a seminar for the disabled in Canada. Alpha Diene's business was doing well and he was inspired to help other disabled people lead an independent and fulfilling life.

Through a USAID-funded project with DynaEnterprises (DYNA), he successfully bid on a print job that provided him with the opportunity to train members of an association for the disabled in a rural area of southeastern Senegal. Alpha Diene led a five-day workshop providing instruction on silkscreen techniques and how to set up a small business.



Photo: Laura Miller

Alpha Diene teaches silkscreen techniques and business development.

"Trainees paid \$4 to help defray training costs, receiving a money-back guarantee in exchange. If they're not satisfied with the training, they get reimbursed," says DYNA's business development specialist Mouhamadou Bachir Ndiya. "So far no one has asked for their money back."

The association is already reaping the benefits of Alpha Diene's training. Participants recently signed their first contract to print T-shirts for a community radio station and formed an economic interest group to market their skills.

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-Alpha Diene, T-shirt Entrepreneur

The \$26 million USAID-funded project operates in five rural areas. It provides training, technical assistance and other support to microfinance institutions, small businesses, and business associations.

"At first, we were worried about how people would take it," says Ndiya, "but the success stories from training participants have instilled confidence in our program. Micro-entrepreneurs realize that the fees they pay to receive training are nominal compared to the benefits and added income they get in return."

"At the seminar in Canada, I saw what people like me could do and I wanted to replicate it on a small scale in Senegal", says Diene. His example is very encouraging. By improving his skills and adding a training component to his business, he has shown other handicapped people that success in business is a path to greater independence.